

**Board of Forestry and Fire Protection  
Range Management Advisory Committee (RMAC)  
Vegetation Management/Fire Focus Group**

**Minutes  
February 24, 2005**

**Attending:**

Ken Zimmerman  
Mike Connor  
Clancy Dutra  
J.R. McCollister  
Leonard Hale  
Henry Giacomini  
Mel Thompson  
Jeff Stephens  
Barney Ward

**Representing**

RMAC Chairman  
Public Member  
California Farm Bureau  
Public Member  
Watershed Fire Council of Southern California  
California Farm Bureau  
California Wool Growers Association  
CDF / RMAC Executive Secretary  
CDF Lassen Modoc Unit

**Agenda Items 1&2 Call to Order and Introductions:**

Focus Group Chair J.R. McCollister called the meeting to order February 24, 2005 at 9:00 AM. A review of the January 4 minutes was completed with minor alterations.

**Agenda Item 4 Review of the CDF Vegetation Management Program (VMP):**

Mike Connor assumed the lead in the discussion of the CDF VMP. The discussion resulted in the following primary points for consideration in preparing the report of recommendations to the Board.

VMP Not Meeting Objectives: VMP has been a valuable program for California in the past. However, the original goals have not been achieved. In recent years there has been a steady decline in treated acres each year.

Eliminating the Program: Discussion was presented recommending that the Board consider elimination of the VMP since it has not performed according to the intent of the original legislation and budget. The rationale being that the Board and the Department need to come to the realization that this program is not performing as intended and resources may be better spent elsewhere. This was countered by comments indicating that RMAC's charge is to offer recommendations for improving the program rather than to eliminate it.

Future Program Viability: The issue of whether VMP is viable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century was discussed and this question should be raised in the introductory statement of

the recommendations. This discussion included comments indicating that the Department has become more reactionary in its approach to managing fuels rather than proactive. There needs to be a shift which emphasizes resource management as much as fire protection. A focus on Vegetation Management based on the principles of Resource Management is supported by Board policy. The Department is willing to suppress fire at any cost. But the Department takes on a defensive posture when dealing with obstacles that must be overcome for accomplishing projects. In addition the Department has evolved into something much more than just wildland protection.

Document Organization: The document as presently written contains information which is best placed in an introduction. All sections of the document will have to be edited for organization. Organization may be one of an Introduction, Statement of Issues, Discussion, followed by Recommendations.

Statement of RMAC's Task: RMAC should include in the document a statement of what the assignment is as originally stated by Ross Johnson. This should be considered as part of the introduction.

Solutions and Who Benefits: The report should identify what needs improvement with VMP and who is in favor of the improvement.

Previous VMP Evaluations: The 1883 evaluation of the VMP was cited in discussion. It was noted that the Department at that time found value in conducting larger burns. This information should be cited and used in support of satisfying the assignment given to RMAC by Ross Johnson.

Program Goals Revised: RMAC should set a framework for the process of reviewing the VMP. RMAC needs to establish a clear set of goals for the program. The overriding goals are stated in the original statute PRC 4475. Consider a melding of the goals set forth in the statute with that of the Board and RMAC.

A listing of what these goals may be that go beyond 4475:

1. Restate 4475
2. Examine Board Policy
3. Recommendations specifically from RMAC
  - a. Improve water yield
  - b. Focus on strategic fire hazard removal projects
  - c. Reduce the cost of fire suppression
  - d. Improve fire fighter and public safety
  - e. Develop superior methods for managing vegetation.
  - f. Develop better support for the program (public, departmental???)
  - g. Maximize the use of VMP for training new fire fighters.

- h. Increase the use of other tools besides prescribed fires within the program.
- i. Shift the paradigm from one of just fire protection to resource protection
- j. Utilize VMP

Dedicated Work Force for VMP: Consider the concept of a team to handle the paperwork/red tape of projects. This concept goes along with the idea of a dedicated work force.

CDF Unit Needs: Any program that results from these recommendations should consider the needs of the Units that implement the work. What are their needs? Should the recommendations include a reallocation of resources (money and staffing) to the Units that do the work?

Departmental Commitment: Commitment for doing this work must come from the top management. Director and Region Chief objectives become Unit objectives.

Planned Herbivory: Planned herbivory should be substituted for any reference to grazing as a tool for vegetation management. It is a service that should be paid for and is in need of a formal definition. This is another paradigm shift for many people.

Funding: The bulk of funding through the healthy Forest Initiative is targeting the WUI areas. So is CDF efforts through their State Fire Plan. There is a need to determine the cost (budget) needed for fuels management. Comparisons should be drawn between this funding and the funding needed to suppress wildland fire.

Integrated Program: There should be a program where funding can be selected from different sources so that dollars can be leveraged. Using an MOU among agencies may be the solution. It was suggested that a CRMP may be more preferred than an MOU.

Fire Alliance: Dick Hayes provided a summary of the Fire Alliance organization and function. This organization consists of a 9 agency council that manages the State Clearing House for Fuels Management projects; a single repository for all proposed projects and available funding. Grant information and funded projects are available on the Fire Safe Council (FSC) website. Dick Hayes recommended that RMAC become involved the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) process. New FSCs are very involved in this process. Involves all stakeholders within a community for developing the plan. A CWPP within a local community has the potential to layout the fuels management strategy and the various tools and funding sources that will be used to accomplish goals for the community.

Streamlining the VMP Process: It is possible that the process for landowners is as streamlined as it is going to get. There is a lot of work that is primarily the

responsibility of the CDF VMP Coordinator. Therefore a place to start is within the Department. A lot of the current process is a case of protecting the Department from environmental misconduct and internal procedures to prevent accidents and escapes. Using categorical exemptions and the new EIR would help. The new EIR should be pushed for more aggressively. Ventura County was offered as an example where negative declarations are done routinely. They do both WUI and wildland projects.

Education and Outreach: If fuels treatment using prescribed fire was better understood by the public then those in opposition such as air boards may be more supportive since their public would be more supportive. Education is the key to having a positive impact on VMP; The users, public, regulators that impact the program.

Disincentives on the part of Air Districts: Funding to local government is withheld when air attainment standards are not met. We need the trade off of better air quality in the long run decided at a higher level. This concept should appear in the report to the Board.

Meeting closed with the intent to further finalize a document at the April 2005 meeting of RMAC.

#### **Agenda Items 1&2 Call to Order and Introductions:**

New Business: The RMAC by discussion elected not to support the California Noxious and Invasive Weed Action Plan. The report includes statements that are not supported by RMAC. A motion was made and carried to have the reference to RMAC removed on page ii of the document and have Jeff Stephens contact California Department of Food and Agriculture to make this change. Motion carried.

#### **Tasks:**

Mike Connor shall make an attempt to define Planned Herbivory.  
Jeff Stephens shall obtain cost figures for fighting the fires of 2003.  
Dick Hayes agreed to provide additional information on CWPP.  
Jeff Stephens